

India

INDIA'S REVOLUTION

By

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By

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IN THE LIGHT of the evolutionary growth of revolutions and their constant approach to more ideal goals, it is of extreme interest to estimate the significance of the present revolution in India. This revolution has come out of desperation, and to the goal of absolute freedom it must go. Whether it succeeds now or not, it has already contributed a new and radical idea to the progress of humanity, which will be a permanent gift to international thought. This contribution comes, perhaps, nearer the goal of idealism than that of any other revolution, because the contribution is that highly idealistic and inspiring one of passive resistance.

In its inception, the Indian revolution was passive in character. Though in the latter stages it lost its original character and switched towards active resistance, yet it never lost sight of the spirit of passivism. Even the recourse to violence, forced upon the people by the British government, was more a protest against brutalities and barbarities committed on the unarmed and unfed masses by the alien autocrats. It was adopted only when they were not allowed to voice their silent protest against the alien laws that legalize and perpetuate the enslavement of themselves—one-fifth of humanity.

The desire for freedom has been growing stronger and stronger day by day. In 1917 the British authorities recognized the revolutionary tendencies by the appointment of the Rowlatt Commission to investigate revolutionary conspiracies in India. By this act alone they acknowledged the invalidity of their title to rule India against the will of her 315 millions of people. In 1919, driven to desperation by the continued growth of the revolutionary movement, the Government introduced the infamous Rowlatt Bills and had them passed against the unanimous voice of the Indian members of the Legislature Council who are, of course, in the minority. These Rowlatt Acts revived the Spanish Inquisition and the Star Chamber of the Tudor and Stuart period, in their worst forms. According to their provisions:

1. Any Indian is subject to arrest without trial, upon suspicion, and detention without trial for an unlimited duration of time.

2. The burden of proof rests upon the accused.

3. The accused is kept ignorant of the names of his accusers and of witnesses against him. The accused is not confronted with his accusers or with witnesses against him, and is entitled only to a written account of the offenses attributed to him.

4. The accused is deprived of the help of a lawyer, and no witnesses are allowed in his defense.

5. The accused is given a secret trial, before a Commission of three High Court Judges, who may sit at any place they deem fit—in a cellar if they choose. The method of their procedure or their findings may not be made public.

6. Trial by jury is denied. The right of appeal is denied. "No order under this Act shall be called into question in any court, and no suit or prosecution or other legal proceeding shall be made against any person for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done under this Act."

7. The accused may be convicted of an offense with which he is not charged.

8. The prosecution "shall not be bound to observe the rules of the law of evidence." Prosecution may accept evidence of absent witnesses. The witnesses may be dead, or may never have existed.

9. The authorities are given power to use "any and every means" in carrying out the law and in obtaining confessions. In other words, torture.

10. Any person possessing "seditious" documents, pictures or words, intending that the same shall be published or circulated, is liable to arrest and imprisonment. According to the definition of "seditious," absence of affection for the British Government would be legally held to mean disaffection against it.

11. Men who have served prison terms for political offenses may be restricted to certain specific areas, must report regularly to the police, cannot change address without notification of authorities, and must give securities for good behavior. They can never thereafter write on or discuss or attend meetings on any subject of public importance including even social, religious, and educational.

12. Any person (even the family) voluntarily associating with an ex-political prisoner may be arrested and imprisoned.

13. Search without warrant of any suspected place or home is provided for.

The people of India, led by that great passive resistance advocate, Mr. M. K. Gandhi, and that spirited soul, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, raised their voice of protest by observing the 6th of April as a national Day of Humiliation and Prayer. All over India shops were shut and general mourning was observed as a silent protest against the passage of the Rowlatt Bills. But undue interference of the authorities prevented them from even making a passive demonstration of protest. Shops were opened at the point of bayonets, passive resistance leaders were kidnapped and transferred to unknown destinations, and, according to the London Herald, twelve persons in one city were flogged for destroying government notices.

For a number of days following the Day of Humiliation and Prayer, the country was quiet. But suddenly, on April 11, the whole of India,

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from Bombay to Calcutta and from Kashmir to Madras, went on a general strike. That day witnessed the greatest display of passivism the world has ever seen. People threw themselves in front of tram cars and moving trains, and succeeded in their attempts to induce their fellow-workers to stop work. They refrained from picketing and all other direct action.

This extreme passive renunciation, the like of which is not to be found in the history of any country, brought in that extraordinary unanimity among all classes and all creeds. High and low, rich and poor, Hindu and Parsee, Mohammedan and Brahmin, were solidly united against the foreign rulers, for the emancipation of their Motherland. Hindus went to Moslem mosques and prayed along with their Mohammedan comrades in the orthodox Mohammedan style; and the Mohammedans went to the Hindu temples and prayed in the orthodox Hindu style, clasping the hands of their Hindu brothers as they knelt, praying for the same great ideal—the freedom of India. Such a thing as this is unique; it is possible only in India where freedom of toleration for differences of opinion exists in practice, and is not a dead letter. This fraternization of two widely different religious sects is a contribution to the real civilization which is to come, and India is well proud of it. Though the revolution may be suppressed by sheer brute force, still this contribution will live through all time.

Even with this fraternization the British officials interfered. Mosques and Temples were ordered closed and surrounded by police and military guards. The people were forced to disperse by fire from machine guns and bombs from aeroplanes—the “civilized” weapons of Christian nations.

Naturally, as might have been expected in any other country, passive protest of the masses was ineffective, and the people, losing patience, resorted to active methods. They began destroying banks and postoffices, demolishing government buildings, destroying bridges and means of communication, blowing up railway trains carrying troops to kill them, and attacking Englishmen. All this was by way of open challenge to the right of alien domination and economic exploitation.

It was at this juncture that Mr. M. K. Gandhi called upon the people participating in the passive resistance movement to refrain from all further acts of violence, declaring that attacks upon Englishmen and other lawless acts constituted a blot on the movement for which the people should atone. He then fixed three days for fasting in atonement for acts of violence. And, according to the London Times for April 25, his followers did three days fasting as “penance.”

But the situation was out of control. It became so serious that the Governor General, on the 14th of April, announced in unmistakable terms, that he was “satisfied that a state of open rebellion” existed in India. Thereafter, Mr. Gandhi retired from the field, and the moderate elements—the Home Rulers—rallied to the side of the Government and denounced the movement, thus repeating the history of the Russian Revolution of 1905.

New India, however, had tasted of the cup of freedom and went on its march toward emancipation. By the 20th of the month nearly half of the entire country was placed under martial law. The following day the Governor General issued an ordinance ordering deportation to the Andaman Islands for life, or the extreme form of punishment, for political suspects tried under martial law. He forbade the publication of all newspapers except those first passed upon and censored by government agents.

Following the martial law order, all news from India, meager as it had always been, ceased. It was not until the Afghans on the northwestern frontier invaded India on the 9th of May that any news was permitted to reach America. The news stated that the Afghans were guarding the Khyber and Bolan passes, the only two passes connecting India with Afghanistan, and through Afghanistan with Russia. The Afghans further sent a mission to Moscow, thereby violating the treaty of 1880, by which the British had forced them to relinquish their right to treat independently with other nations.

These facts are especially significant when we consider that the Afghans were supplied with machine guns, apparently from some European source, and that Hindu revolutionists have been stationed in Moscow working with the Russian Socialist Government since November, 1917. Furthermore, an article published in the Bombay Times of April 15th stated that the Bolsheviks had forwarded £25,000 sterling to Bombay. The same paper quoted a telegram from Helsingfors, in March, predicting the outbreak.

News coming from India at the present time is very meager. But this is certain: the revolution is on, as also are the massacres perpetrated by the British on the masses—atrocities compared with which German barbarities in Belgium sink to nothingness. These atrocities are carried on by the very power which has been given the “mandatory” of practically half the habitable world by the conference of old diplomats sitting at Versailles. This much is also certain: Britain will sacrifice much of that habitable area before she will give up India.

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She will give China to Japan, she will give up many of her other possessions, but desperate and bleeding India, and the route leading to India, she will hold by every means from diplomacy to liquid fire and poison gas.

Whatever the outcome of the present revolution, India has shown that it is not lagging behind any other nation in idealism and radicalism. The Hindus and Mohammedans have been cemented by the closest ties. Younger India has shown to the world what it desires and what it must have for self-existence. India has determined what it needs and it is also determined to get it. The people will not adopt violent means simply for the sake of violence. By birth and by heritage they abhor it, in practice as well as in theory. But if their passive efforts are met by active and brutal opposition, they will not hesitate to adopt those measures for the time being, to smash to pieces all civilized

Christian methods of subjection, and to smash them once for all.

In idealism and radicalism India is not inferior to the inspired idealists of other countries. In some parts of the country the people are attempting to adopt communal ownership of land and property, and to revive their indigenous democratic village community system. They have succeeded in a few sections, such as in the Punjab, where the revolution has gained a strong foothold. The official press states that the "fanatical" Hindus are demanding expropriation of landlords, and communal ownership and control of the earth! It is true that these "illogical" and simple Hindus have always held that the land belongs to the people, and now they are determined to see that this becomes a reality. The social and economic ideals of the people to the north of the Himalayas are not new to the Hindus.

SAINENDRA NATH GHOSE.